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INFLUENCE OF THE FORM OF SOCIAL CHANGE UPON THE EMOTIONAL LIFE OF A PEOPLE.

ONE of the most important problems in social psychology is that of the relation of the mental characteristics of a people to the form of their social evolution. Intellectual and emotional elements are not to be regarded simply from the standpoint of their being the causes of social change. Neither are they therefore only the epiphenomena of a deeper series of changes. They are rather specializations occurring within a larger process, bearing a definite relation both to the onward movement of the process and to its historical aspects. In this larger whole are the habits and beliefs of generations, environing conditions both physical and social, and the ideas and feelings that arise from time to time for effecting readjustments.

If mental elements have a functional significance in the history of any people, they manifestly must be stated in terms of the conditions out of which they arose and with reference to what they accomplish. The genealogy of any idea or sentiment does not, however, consist simply in previous ideas or sentiments, but in the entire preceding social situation. The particular psychical characteristics of any people then bear an intimate relation to the manner of their social development. It is perhaps commonplace enough to hold that the characteristics of today are the outcome of those of yesterday. But our point is more than this. It is to be shown that the manner of the change from one period to another, not simply its mere fact, exerts a determining influence on the mental life that is involved. If then we find a certain people distinguished by strong intellectual or emotional tendencies, we should look for explanation to the *form* of their development, the *way* in which change has been wrought among them, as well as to the less tangible qualities of racial temperament and environmental conditions. In other words, it is the *manner* in which these forces exert their influence that is the important point. There is no such thing as *mere* influence of surroundings and of social temperament in general.

The particular theme of this paper is that the emotionalism that seems to belong to certain times and peoples is definitely related to the form of the social evolution of the peoples concerned. The solution of this problem has important bearings on certain aspects of the psychology of religion.

The emotionalism that certain forms of religion at all times naturally tend to foster must be carefully distinguished from the social tendencies to emotion that appear at certain periods and in time pass away. The latter is due to the form of the social situation. The explanation of the former involves us in the question as to why religion has tended to select certain mental states as peculiarly expressive of its attitude and why it has excluded others. It involves the whole question of the psychology of the religious attitude and the functional relation of emotion to the entire mental economy. We are concerned with this aspect of the question only in so far as the tendency to select and emphasize certain emotional elements of experience as of special religious value has made religion particularly susceptible to those elements in any situation that predispose to emotionalism. That is, if a given situation can be described as tending to produce an emotional tone, the stimulus it offers will be readily responded to by religion from the fact of its natural leaning in that direction. The main problem that concerns us here is as to the extent to which various combinations of influence may predispose to this emotional attitude.

From the functional point of view, emotion is connected with the interruption of previous co-ordinations, either habitual or instinctive, and under normal conditions it may be supposed to assist in the formation of new co-ordinations. The more readily the new co-ordinations are formed, the less consciousness is there of an emotional tone from the previously broken habit. This statement of the nature of emotion is usually confined in its reference to the individual, but it may, under certain conditions, apply on a larger scale to nations and races. Just as the breaking up of the habitual or instinctive adjustments of the individual results in bringing to his consciousness the internal attitudes, physiological and psychical, that were previously organized with

the overt activity and hence were not attended to as such, so the break-up of the fundamental habits of a nation, or even an interference with its customs by some external agency, may result in a social attitude analogous to that of emotion in the individual. In the individual this condition may be described as one of suspension following the coming to consciousness of the insufficiency or the impossibility of the old adjustment before a new one can be formed.

For the best examples of this state on the social side we must go to those peoples to whom custom means a very different thing than to ourselves. We are living in a period of perpetual readjustment, but there have been times and races to which the stoppage of old usages, in fact all change, has meant everything that is serious and fraught with danger. The consciousness of such a people seems to be wholly expressed in their customs. If any individuality arises, it is ignored or repressed. Whatever initiative occurs outside the recognized lines is regarded as disgraceful, impious, or as a sin against society. The habits of a people who have lived in comparative isolation in their formative period come to have an inclusiveness and a validity that it is difficult for us to realize. What now will be the result if such a people, through external influences of some sort, as contact with other races, or through the process of their own development, are forced to break with their traditions more or less suddenly? Try to conceive such a race brought suddenly into intimate contact with a people of widely differing customs and perhaps of another plane of culture. For the first time they will feel the narrowness of their own traditions. They see others living and prospering without doing the things that they themselves have grown to consider such an essential part of life. They are not in a position to see that customs are simply methods of living. Instead they have set them up as absolutely valid, and when their old faith in them is clearly proved groundless, they are apt to cast them aside entirely, as having no value.

Old habits may gradually be found to be inadequate as conditions change, and the result may be as gradual a readjustment. But when the old is simply cut off or rendered inadequate there

is no means for any movement toward a new and better adjusted set of habits. The previous standards of action, the regulative principles, are gone. The mental condition of a people under such circumstances is apt to be an emotional one. The particular form that the emotional attitudes will take will, however, vary indefinitely according to previous habits, temperament, the nature of the interrupting influences, etc.

The Malays, especially of the Malay peninsula, furnish an interesting study from this point of view. They are characterized by a peculiarly emotional temperament, as is proved by their passion for gambling, dramatic performances of all kinds, cock and bull fighting, etc. We can trace these well-nigh universal characteristics of the Malays to certain peculiarities in their social evolution. Their normal development was interrupted at least twice within historic times by different foreign invaders, and twice did they have thrust upon them alien customs and alien religions.¹ They have been Muhammadans since the fifteenth century, and beneath their Muhammadanism is a layer of Hinduism which goes back perhaps to the twelfth century. Many fragments of their native religion have, however, persisted in various forms, unabsorbed or unreconstructed by the foreign faiths. The customs of the invading races have been in large degree superposed on the conquered, merely checking and suppressing the native habits without supplying an organized channel of expression that would take up and utilize the old values and thus furnish the basis for real progress.

It is a matter of indifference to the present inquiry whether the Malays, if left to themselves, would ever have perfected their primitive social institutions, or whether their development would have been arrested, as it has been with most of the natural races. In either case the effect on themselves of these foreign elements would have been the same. Their organic forms of social control were not only crippled, but isolated from their normal setting, and hence brought to consciousness with no very definite demands for reconstruction, so that the crises ended in emotional states of mind instead of in rapid adjustments for

¹ SKEAT, *Malay Magic*. The Macmillan Co., 1901.

further action. Applying the psychology of inhibition to situations of this kind, we can see why mere repression results in emotionalism. While reconstruction of the old, and hence real progress, is a possibility in all such cases, it seems to be only the highest races that are practically able to meet new conditions and customs, and either adapt or adopt them. Most peoples, and a vast number of individuals in even the highest races, are helpless when they are deprived of their habitual or perhaps hereditary modes of activity and expression. The internal adjustments of the organism, deprived of their normal setting in overt action, are brought to consciousness. The attention is centered on them instead of on the ends with which they were originally organized, and for which they had their existence. They thus in themselves become interesting, and interest in organic adjustments, instead of in the ends they are meant to serve, is an attitude closely analogous to the emotional, if not identical with it. On the whole, then, we should say it is very disastrous for a people thus to come to consciousness of the more or less subjective elements that are normally organized with their overt social processes, unless they have an accompanying consciousness of how to reconstruct these processes.

The Malays and the Hebrews form an interesting contrast in this respect. Without pushing the comparison too far, we may say at least that as the tribal consciousness of the Hebrews was gradually dissolved because of the national calamities that befell them, the local rites that could, in consequence, no longer be performed in the primitive objective fashion, were gradually idealized and given a significance far beyond that which originally belonged to them. When through disasters of foreign invasions they could no longer perform the ancestral rites at the tribal sanctuaries nor at Jerusalem, there were some who were able to point out that Jehovah might still be worshiped if they would but raise up altars to him in their hearts.¹ In other words, when the grounds for a detached emotional consciousness arose, there were forces already active among the Hebrews that made possible a reconstruction on a higher level of what had proved both

¹ ROBERTSON SMITH, *Religion of the Semites*.

inadequate and impossible on the lower plane. With the Malays it was entirely different. In their case the emotional consciousness that was developed had no ultimate significance. By being unable to make readjustments, they developed a useless emotionalism. The Malays stand for a type of emotionalism in which there is permanent failure to effect readjustments, and consequently to turn the attention again into overt channels.

There are periods, however, to be found in which such an emotionalism gradually passes away and the normal mental balance is restored. There are many mental characteristics of the centuries immediately preceding and following the beginning of the Christian era that become most intelligible when we consider them in the light of the social changes that were then going on. There is certainly abundant proof that these times had many emotional tendencies. Sports of the most exciting character flourished as never before nor since. A peculiar religious enthusiasm prevailed, involving the formation of many new sects, the origin and spread through the Mediterranean countries of a great religion, and the development of a type of mind that found expression in trances, asceticism, visions, etc., all essentially the phenomena of emotionalism. The question is whether these phenomena can be interpreted in the light of any strong subjective tendencies of the people of those times.

The hosts of vagarious religious sects that sprang up at the time of the Roman empire are evidence of such subjectivity. "Almost every variety of charlatanism and of belief displayed itself unchecked and boasted its train of proselytes."¹ The attitude of mind underlying these phenomena had begun to develop several centuries before. The first evidence of it had been in the rise of the mysteries and similar sects in Greece and other of the eastern countries. Such organizations marked a certain disintegration in the power of the primitive religions. They seemed to be attempts to realize values to which the old religions had failed to give the key. They were reconstructions of certain elements in the previous experience of the adherents to effect ends that they realized the more vividly because of the failure

¹ LECKY, *History of European Morals*, Vol. I, p. 235.

of the old forms of worship to furnish them. The movement beginning in the mysteries thus culminated in the vagaries of religious belief in the time of the empire. Originating in the failure of the old habits and the effort to reconstruct them for more adequate experience, they gradually degenerated into mere thirst for novelty. There is always danger, as has been said, when the impulse to reconstruct is aroused, that the attention will be diverted to the process of reconstruction and that the end for which alone the intermediate activities have significance will be lost sight of. This is especially apt to be true if the new adjustment is not easily effected. These later religious sects represent, then, the morbid interest in the process of making adjustments rather than the desire to obtain a better life through them.

It was inevitable that forms of worship set up outside the traditional religions should tend to create a certain amount of subjectivity, the more noticeable because of its contrast with the extreme objectivity of the older forms of belief. To anyone who had given up the old worship, the only means of judging the relative value of the new systems would be their efficiency in stirring up emotional responses. If there was nothing in objective precedent or tradition to commend one series of rites over another, the subjective criterion must inevitably be set up. Religious practices would be distinguished from one another, not by variety of function in an objective social order, but by the variety of emotional suggestion they were able to afford. The subjective standard would be the only one that would be available under such circumstances. The ascetic mania of many of these sects, and of Christianity as well, is additional proof that the evolution going on was essentially a subjective one. Asceticism is one of the directions in which a morbid interest in internal conditions may lead. It is not meant that people have no subjective states in those times when the objective social order keeps the attention fixed on overt ends. The point is that under such circumstances the subjective states have no validity in themselves, they stand for nothing distinct from the objective interests, and thus the conditions of discrimination, as described by James, are not present. The feeling exists, but it

is essentially a part of an overt interest. There is no other way to account for the terrible excesses of asceticism in the early Christian centuries. We look in vain in the New Testament for teaching that could be even wrenched into a justification of such practices. It was not any direct teaching of Christianity, but the general subjective attitude, that caused healthful precepts to be thus distorted.

This subjective and emotional attitude in religious matters was only a part of a larger process of this period. That it found its best expression in the religious sphere is accounted for by the nature of the religious attitude itself. The latter is the most delicate of all indices to deep-lying subjective, or emotional, tendencies. But it must be remembered that the movement is itself the fundamental thing, and that religion is simply the one element in the social organism most susceptible to such stimuli.

Several centuries before the Christian era were the beginnings of an absolutely unique upheaval for the nations of the Mediterranean. It began in the disintegration of the primitive forms of social control, and, before new and more adequate forms could be built up, ancient civilization was engulfed in northern barbarism. The reconstruction that should have followed at once upon the breaking down of the old was postponed for many centuries, thus prolonging a psychological state that has no parallel in history. In the most general terms, the epoch began in a transition from tribal institutions and religion to national and international customs and religious codes. The primitive forms of tribal organization and control may be said to have continued to form the basis of the civilization of southern Europe long after the tribes themselves had ceased to exist except in name. The national governments were little more than the result of attempts to apply tribal institutions on a large scale without any genuine reconstruction of them. There were naturally limits beyond which such a procedure could not be carried. Whatever forces tended to weaken the hold of primitive custom, and especially of primitive religion, hastened the time when reconstruction could no longer be deferred. Prominent among these causes must have been the great increase in intercourse through war and commerce between the various

nations. In this way great differences in customs and religion were gradually brought to consciousness. The influx of Greeks into Rome in the centuries immediately preceding our era no doubt contributed largely toward the breaking up of primitive Roman morality. It is customary to regard the vice and luxury that reigned in Rome during the times of the foreign conquests as the cause of the decadence in its morals. It would be more correct to regard it merely as a concomitant. They fell an easy prey to the vices of conquest because their primitive social structure, the real basis of their morality, was already undermined. The old standards of conduct had given way, and the people as a whole were left in that state of suspense so closely akin to emotionalism. They had lost faith in the old, and there was as yet nothing to take its place. With the decay of primitive standards of conduct the primitive systems of control also fell away. Thus it is not strange that in the time of the empire the conduct of the people was often marked by wild caprice. While this state of mind did not necessarily seek expression in games and combats, the fact that they met with such popular favor and were indulged in to such excess when they were offered, indicates that there was then at least a state of mind ready for just such expression.

Another evidence that they were fast breaking with the old was the fact that even national feeling was declining, or perhaps it was only the tribal feeling that was losing its hold, no real national sentiment having as yet ever existed. Lecky says in his *History of European Morals* that "the period between Panætius and Constantine exhibited an irresistible tendency to cosmopolitanism. The convergence, when we consider the number, force, and harmony of the influences that composed it, is indeed unexampled in history. The movement extended to all the fields of religion, philosophy, political, industrial, and domestic life. The character of the people was completely transformed, the landmarks of all its institutions were removed, and the whole principle of its organization reversed. It would be impossible to find a more striking example of the manner in which events govern character, destroying old habits and associa-

tions and thus altering that national type of excellence which is the expression of national institutions and circumstances."

Stoicism and Epicureanism may be regarded as typical expressions of the remnants of older sentiment in the midst of just such periods of decay before the later reconstruction has had time to be effected. These philosophies were efforts to get an orientation in the midst of disintegrating primitive morals. In the emotional turmoil that accompanied the loss of old beliefs, the Stoic endeavored to turn in on himself and there find the moral stability that was lacking in the external world. The Epicurean tried to ignore the wants implied in these primitive religious forms, seeking happiness in what came to hand, worrying not over ultimate values. In short, we have in these two philosophies two characteristic points of view for a period of disintegrating morals. They did not attempt to reconstruct, but to state the kind of comfort the wise man might get out of what was left. The barren casuistry that they fostered was the natural expression of an age that had lost its old standards and had not as yet worked out new ones.

Whether or not we regard Christianity as simply another expression of this period of disintegration in a further stage of its development, we must at any rate admit that its tremendous progress was due to the state of mind of the people among whom it was propagated. It was essentially a reconstructing force, while the philosophies of the time were merely statements of the way the individual could, in the midst of the present ruin, retain his sense of moral values or dispense with them. The Christianity of that time did not seek simply to retain in the individual the sense of values lost to the community as a whole. It attempted rather a statement of the best elements of the old worships on a new basis. It offered the charm of sympathetic worship, the joyous fellowship of the primitive religions, adding to it the subjective evaluations that had in the earlier period been held of only minor importance.

In no wise is the changed temper of the people more clearly to be seen than in the growth of the subjective as over against the objective emotions. Benevolence and sympathy were set

up as the ideal virtues rather than love of country. In the early Christian centuries, Lecky tells us, the civic virtues were on the whole greatly diminished and sometimes almost extinct. "The quarrels between the factions of the chariot races for a long period eclipsed all political and intellectual differences, filled streets with blood, and determined revolutions of the state." Christianity, by laying emphasis upon the value of the subjective attitudes of the individual, tended to underrate the worth of the civic and intellectual virtues. The whole power of the doctrine of the other world, the New Jerusalem, lay in the fact that the present world, with its institutions, had disintegrated, and it was easier to construct an ideal world than to reconstruct the ruins of the real world. The treachery toward every department of government, the cowardice of the army, the frivolity of character that demanded violent emotional excitement even in the midst of great material disaster, the subtle controversies of the Pelagians, the frequent willingness of the religionist to betray his country, all these things are evidences of the loss of the power of the objective order upon men's minds and the substitution of more or less personal interests.

The multiplication of illegitimate organizations and communities outside the state were but the further expression of the deep disintegrating movement. The members of these organizations boasted that they had no interests more indifferent to them than those of their own country. This is the natural confession of the subjectivist. Patriotism was the expression of the solidarity of the primitive state. Hence, when the state gave way the objective emotion of patriotism gave way with it. The broader life into which the ancients were irresistibly led rendered it impossible for the primitive solidarity to endure. Thus the decay of the state and the changed attitude toward it were co-ordinate results of a single process.

These facts, familiar to all, are offered in support of the proposition that the emotional characteristics of a people are largely dependent on the form of their social evolution. There can be no doubt but that the period just considered was a time when, under the stress of growth, the old order was disintegrat-

ing. It has been shown that under such conditions subjective standards tend to be set up and emotional states emphasized. If, then, it is true that these centuries were abnormally emotional, the fact can be explained in terms of the social situation of the time. It was because the transition from the old to the new was long and difficult that the emotions lost their hold on the objective world and gained a validity of their own.

If the mental life of a people is so closely related to its institutions and traditions, it is questionable whether it is ever right for a so-called higher race to bring strong pressure to bear upon a lower one, even in the name of civilization or religion. It is much easier to destroy the hold of the old than it is to force an adjustment to the new. Hence it is that the natural races upon contact with civilization seem to be affected, in the main, by its vices rather than its virtues. The movement away from the old must have its chief motive from within, if that movement is to result in a more adequate social system. A people should never be forced to break with their past except as this past appeals to them as inadequate. Otherwise the result can only be the destruction of their own systems of control, and with them the virtues connected therewith. If changes are not motivated by elements having organic connection with the past life, a people finds itself deprived of those regulative conditions essential to all morality, whether among civilized or savage. There being no movement from within that calls for the change, there is no basis for a new system of control and hence for a new morality. The virtues of the culture races, which have caused them to break with their past, are dependent upon their complicated social structure and are therefore incapable of being assimilated by the barbarian. The superficial character of the religious awakening occurring in the Hawaiian Islands during the early days of the missionary propagandism there is a remarkable instance of the futility of a natural race attempting to adopt the morals of a culture people. It amounts, with the masses of the people, to little more than the loss of their own systems of control. The last state of such a people is apt to be worse than the first.

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